

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 207444
ORIGIN SS-15

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /016 R

66011

DRAFTED BY: IO/UNA:JFTEFFT

APPROVED BY: S/S/A:RSNIDER

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O 161627Z AUG 78

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

INFO USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE 9614

S E C R E T STATE 207444

EXDIS FROM UNA

FOLLOWING REPEAT DAMASCUS 4688, ACTION SECSTATE INFO AMMAN
BEIRUT CAIRO JERUSALEM JIDDA TEL AVIV 06 AUG:

QUOTE S E C R E T DAMASCUS 4688

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PEPR, SY, LE

SUBJ: ASSAD'S VIEW OF LEBANON'S CHRISTIANS

REF: STATE 204738

1. SUMMARY: ASSAD MAY INDEED BE UNDER MISAPPREHENSION THAT SYRIA CAN STILL COUNT ON SUPPORT OF OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF LEBANESE CHRISTIANS. WE ARE DOING WHAT WE CAN TO CORRECT THIS VEIW AND I INTEND TO REAISE MATTER DIRECTLY WITH ASSAD WHEN I PRESENT MY CREDENTIALS, BUT WE PROBABLY WILL NOT HAVE MUCH IMPACT IF CERTAIN LEBANESE AND SYRIAN CHRISTIAN LEADERS THEMSELVES CONTINUE TO TELL ASSAD SOMETHING DIFFERENT. END SUMMARY.

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2. GHASSAN TUENI MAY BE RIGHT THAT PRESIDENT ASSAD HAS A DISTORTED VIEW OF LEBANON AND BELIEVES THAT SYRIA CAN STILL COUNT ONSUPPORT OF OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF LEBANESE CHRISTIANS RE ITS ROLE THERE. WE PREVIOUSLY REMARKED ON THE CONFLICTING REPORTS HE GEST FROM HIS DISPARATE INTELLIGENCE ORGANIZATIONS (DAMASCUS 4251). THIS PROBLEM IS

SOMEWHAT AMELIORATED BY THE PROMINENT ROLE BRIG GEN KHOULI IS NOW PLAYING IN DEALING WITH THE LEBANESE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY. A FORMER ASSISTANT OF KHOULI'S TOLD US THAT (#97)8'S REPORTS ARE OBJECTIVE AND THAT HE DOES NOT SHY AWAY FROM GIVING HIS BOSS BAD NEWS. THIS IS NOT A TRAIT THAT IS WIDELY SHARED IN THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT. NEVERTHELESS, EVEN KHOULI CANNOT GUARD AGAINST THE PROBABLE TENDENCY OF HIS SOURCES TO SUGARCOAT THE CHRISTIAN ATTITUDES TOWARD THE SYRIANS. THIS IS PARTICULARLY TRUE OF CHRISTIAN SOURCES WITHIN SYRIA WHO ARE AFRAID OF SPILLOVER EFFECT FROM ANIMOSITIES BRED IN LEBANON.

3. WE HAVE MADE KNOWN TO THE MFA TOUR CONCERN THAT RECENT SYRIAN HEAVY-HANDEDNESS IN LEBANON IS ALIENATING THE WHOLE LEBANESE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY. BUT PROBABLY MAY NOT HAVE MADE MUCH OF A DENT. FOR ONE THING, WE HAVE SPOKEN IN GENERALITIES RATHER THAN PRESENTING HARD INTELLIGENCE AND SO MAY NOT SEEM CONVINCING TO ASSAD IN COMPARISON TO HIS OWN SOURCES. FOR ANOTHER, WE HAVE BEEN DEALING THROUGH THE KILTER OF KHADDAM. THERE IS NO QUESTION ABOUT KHADDAM'S ACCURACY IN REPORTING OUR DISCUSSIONS--THE PRESIDENT GETS A TRANSCRIPT--BUT KHADDAM'S EVALUATION TO THE PRESIDENT OF OUR SESSION MAY EFFECTIVELY WATER DOWN OR CONTRADICT OUR ANALYSIS.

4. I INTEND TO DISCUSS THIS DIRECTLY WITH ASSAD WHEN I
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PRESENT MY CREDENTIALS. IN ADDITION, WE ARE TAKING STEPS TO SEE THAT KHOULI GETS OUR VERSION OF WHAT IS GOING ON IN THE LEBANESE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY. BUT THERE IS VERY LITTLE WE CAN DO BEYOND THIS TO CHANGE SYRIAN PERCEPTIONS, UNLESS CERTAIN LEBANESE AND SYRIAN CHRISTIAN LEADERS THEMSELVES ARE PREPARED TO CHALLENGE ASSAD'S VIEWS. SEELYE UNQUOTE.
CHRISTOPHER

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NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CHRISTIANS, FOREIGN RELATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 16 aug 1978
Decaption Date: 20 Mar 2014
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978STATE207444
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: IO/UNA:JFTEFFT
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780335-0726
Format: TEL
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780858/aaaabwbi.tel
Line Count: 101
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 82ef8662-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ORIGIN SS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: 78 STATE 204738
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 28 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1720169
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ASSAD\`S VIEW OF LEBANON\`S CHRISTIANS
TAGS: PEPR, SY, LE
To: USUN NEW YORK
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/82ef8662-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014